

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4406

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 PANAMA 4007/2

STADIS/EXDIS////////////////////////////////////

5. THE GENERAL SAID THAT HAVING GONE THROUGH THIS EXPERIENCE OF UP'S AND DOWN'S, HE COULD UNDERSTAND WHY SOME COUNTRIES--IN DEALING WITH WASHINGTON--FELT THEY HAD TO TURN TO THE SOCIALIST CAMP FOR BACKING AND HELP. BUT HE WANTED ME TO KNOW THAT, HOWEVER STRONG THE TEMPTATION TO GO THAT ROUTE, HE HAD NO INTENTION OF MOVING PANAMA DOWN THAT PATH. HE SAID HE REALIZED THAT THE POLITICAL PRICE OF TURNING TO THE COMMUNISTS WOULD BE FAR HIGHER THAN HE OR PANAMA WOULD BE WILLING TO PAY. THE IMPLICATION WAS VERY CLEAR, HOWEVER. IF HE (TORRIJOS) WERE TO GO DOWN THE DRAIN, ANY LIKELY SUCCESSOR COULD BE EXPECTED TO TURN TO HAVANA AND MOSCOW FOR AID AND COMFORT. HE DID NOT VOICE THIS; IT WAS SIMPLY PALPABLE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CONVERSATION.

6. TORRIJOS THEN SAID HE WANTED TO BE PERFECTLY FRANK WITH ME IN LINE WITH OUR LONG-STANDING AGREEMENT NOT TO CONFRONT EACH OTHER WITH MAJOR SURPRISES. PANAMA WOULD BE GOING TO THE MEETING OF NON-ALIGNED NATIONS IN LIMA NEXT MONTH. THERE, THEY WOULD FORMALLY JOIN THAT GROUPING AND WOULD PRESU HARD FOR ITS SUPPORT FOR THE PANAMANIAN CAUSE. ALSO, IN THE ABSENCE OF SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION--OR AT LEAST VISIBLE PROGRESS--IN NEGOTIATIONS, PANAMA WOULD RAISE THE PROBLEM OF THE CANAL ZONE IN THE UNITED NATIONS IN NOVEMBER. HE INDICATED HE WOULD PROBABLY LAY OUT THIS COURSE OF ACTION IN HIS MEETING WITH THE STUDENTS TOMORROW. IT WAS CLEAR THAT HE WAS DESCRIBING THIS COURSE TO ME AS ONE DESIGNED
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IN PART TO PUT PRESSURE ON US IN THE WORLD ARENA, AND IN PART TO RELIEVE PRESSURE ON HIMSELF ON THE DOMESTIC SCENE.

7. THE GENERAL THEN SAID THAT HE WAS UNDER HEAVY AND INCREASING PRESSURE FROM THE LEFT STS AND EXTREMEISTS HERE. HE NOTED THEY HAVE ALREADY ATTACKED THE US (A REFERENCE TO LAST WEEK'S DEMONSTRATION AT THE EMBASSY AS WELL AS THE INCREASINGLY HOSTILE TONE OF THE LOCAL MEDIA), THE FOREIGN MINISTRY: PRESIDENT LAKAS AND THE GOVERNMENT IN GENERAL. HE SAID THEY HAD NOT YET ATTACKED HIM PERSONALLY, BUT INDICATED THAT, TOO, WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME UNLESS THINGS CHANGE.

8. AT THIS POINT, WE PARTED PROMISING TO KEEP IN TOUCH AND TO KEEP EACH OTHER INFORMED OF DEVELOPMENTS. THE GENERAL JOINED HIS INTELLIGENCE AND EDUCATION COLLEAGUES TO WORK OUT PLANS FOR THE MORROW. BUT AS WE LEFT, HE SAID QUOTE PLEASE TELL SECRETARY KISSINGER AND AMBASSADOR BUNKER THAT I TRUST THEM, I HAVE FAITH IN THEIR UNDERSTANDING AND THEIR DESIRE TO DO THE RIGHT THING. I HAVE MORE TRUST IN MEN, GOOD MEN, THAN IN INSTITUTIONS, UNQUOTE.

8. COMMENT: AS NOTED AT THE OUTSET, THIS WAS A SOMBER MEETING. TORRIJOS WAS MORE TENSE AND EDGY THAN I HAVE EVER SEEN HIM BEFORE. HE GAVE THE IMPRESSION OF A SHIP'S CAPTAIN MOVING INTO WATERS BOTH STORMY AND UNKNOWN. HE IS DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE EXTREMISTS AND THEIR POTENTIAL FOR VIOLENCE. AND HE KNOWS WHAT CONFRONTATION WILL DO TO BOTH THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE HERE AND TO THE ECONOMY WHICH IS ALREADY IN SOMETHING OF A TROUGH. HE SEES HIS DREAMS FOR A RAPIDLY PROGRESSING PANAMA IN GRAVE DANGER. YET HE HAS A TIGER BY THE TAIL, BECAUSE AS A PATRIOT HE CANNOT TURN THE FORCE HE COMMANDS AGAINST HIS OWN PEOPLE. HE IS ASKING US FOR HELP. HE ASKS US TO UNDERSTAND THAT A FAIR AGREEMENT WOULD BE GOOD FOR US BOTH. BUT HE IS QUIETLY WARNING US, WITHOUT BEING EXPLICIT AND, INDEEDBN IN SOME DISTRESS, THAT WE ARE IN FOR TROUBLED TIMES IF WE REMAIN HUNG UP ON THE NEGOTIATING FRONT.

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9. TOMORROW'S MEETING WITH THE STUDENTS WILL BE CRUCIAL. IF BEFORE OR IN THE MIDST OF THAT SESSION WE COULD ANNOUNCE THAT AMBASSADOR BUNKER WOULD BE COMING DOWN FOR RESUMED NEGOTIATIONS, THE IMMEDIATE STORM WOULD PASS. BUT OF COURSE THAT WOULD ONLY BE A PALLIATIVE UNLESS WE ARE, AT THE SAME TIME, PREPARED TO MOVE AHEAD ON MORE REASONABLE TERMS ON SUCH MATTERS AS TREATY DURATION AND LAND USE. WITHOUT SOME EARLY MOVEMENT, WE ARE IN FOR DEEP TROUBLE HERE. AND LET US BE CLEAR, BY QUOTE TROUBLE UNQUOTE I DO NOT MEAN MERELY RHETORIC AND INSULTS BUT RATHER VIOLENCE AND PROBABLY BLOODSHED. NEITHER PANAMA NOR WE WANT IT. NEITHER WILL BENEFIT FROM IT. IT IS AVOIDABLE.

JORDEN

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